

The Case of Martin Heidegger, Philosopher and Nazi

Part 2: The Cover-up

Alex Steiner
4 April 2000

We continue today a series on the life and work of twentieth century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The first part was posted on April 3. The final part will posted tomorrow, April 5.

Having reviewed some of the pertinent facts in the career of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, we must now turn to the myths and evasions that constitute the building blocks of his postwar reputation. The official version of the story, propounded by Heidegger and his supporters, has it that his 1933 turn to Nazism was a youthful mistake, a brief flirtation by a scholar who was naïve about politics and the ways of the world. Within a few months, so the story goes, the young philosopher realized his mistake, resigned his position as rector of Freiburg University and refused henceforth to take part in Nazi activities. Furthermore, the legend continues, even during his period as rector, Heidegger tried to protect the integrity of the university from the worst predations of Nazism and personally intervened with the Nazi authorities on behalf of a number of Jewish students and colleagues.

Finally, even if one is not convinced by this account of events, the most one can say, according to his defenders, is that Heidegger the man suffered from a character flaw. Heidegger's personal failing, however, is an entirely separate matter from his philosophy, which must be judged "on its own merits." Concretely this means that any assessment of Heidegger's philosophy that tries to relate it to his Nazism is deemed illegitimate by his apologists. This viewpoint further implies that there is nothing in Heidegger's pre-Nazi philosophy, particularly in *Being and Time* that bears any affinity to Nazi ideas. Similarly, the later turn [Kehre] in Heidegger's philosophy has been interpreted as a purely internal reaction, unrelated to politics, to problems encountered in the initial formulation of his thought.

This is a multi-layered effort at damage control. One can view the cover-up as a redoubt upon whose walls Heidegger's supporters stand fighting to prevent a breach. If the facade, the story of Heidegger's youthful indiscretion, is broken, all is not lost. The inner wall, Heidegger's actions as rector in defiance of the Nazis, still stands. Even if this line of defense is broken, and the supporters are forced to concede the defects of Heidegger the man, there still stands the last line of defense, the so-called autonomy of Heidegger's philosophy. Marshaling an impressive array of intellectuals in his defense, many with impeccable anti-Nazi credentials, Heidegger managed to maintain his reputation relatively intact until the middle of the 1980s.

One can trace the beginnings of the campaign to rescue Heidegger's reputation from the verdict of posterity to the efforts of Heidegger himself. The outlines of the legend of the politically naïve scholar are already adumbrated in the biographical essay Heidegger submitted to the de-Nazification committee in 1945. Here he wrote:

"In April 1933, I was unanimously elected Rector (with two abstentions) in a plenary session of the university and not, as rumor has it,

appointed by the National Socialist minister. [That appointment would come later when Heidegger was made Führer of the university, something he fails to mention. A.S.] It was as a result of pressure from my circle of colleagues ... that I consented to be a candidate for this election and agreed to serve. Previously I neither desired nor occupied an academic office. I never belonged to a political party [This is not exactly the full story as we know that in his early 20s he was the president of a right-wing Catholic youth movement. A.S.] nor maintained a relation, either personal or substantive, with the NSDAP or with governmental authorities. I accepted the rectorship reluctantly and in the interest of the university alone." [1]

Having painted a picture of his reluctant enlistment as rector, the letter proceeds to describe how its author joined the Nazi party, almost as an afterthought, in order to facilitate administrative relations with the university.

"A short while after I took control of the rectorship the district head presented himself, accompanied by two functionaries in charge of university matters, to urge me, in accordance with the wishes of the minister, to join the Party. The minister insisted that in this way my official relations with the Party and the governing organs would be simplified, especially since up until then I had no contact with these organs. After lengthy considerations, I declared myself ready to enter the Party in the interests of the university, but under the express condition of refusing to accept a position within the Party or working on behalf of the Party either during the rectorship or afterward." [2] [He fails to explain here why, if his party membership was motivated by his desire to facilitate his work as rector, he renewed it every year until 1945, long after his duties as rector were terminated. A. S.]

Finally he presents evidence of his opposition to Nazism after his resignation as rector in 1934.

"After my resignation from the rectorship it became clear that by continuing to teach, my opposition to the principles of the National Socialist world-view would only grow.... Since National Socialist ideology became increasingly inflexible and increasingly less disposed to a purely philosophical interpretation, [The "purely philosophical interpretation" is apparently how Heidegger wishes to convey to the reader his initial attraction to Nazism, which unfortunately had lost its metaphysical lustre by 1934. A.S.] the fact that I was active as a philosopher was itself a sufficient expression of opposition ...

"I also demonstrated publicly my attitude toward the Party by not participating in its gatherings, by not wearing its regalia, and, as of 1934, by refusing to begin my courses and lectures with the so-called German greeting [Heil Hitler!]... [We now know from some of the documentation published by Farias that this last statement is a patent lie. A.S.]

"There was nothing special about my spiritual resistance during the last

eleven years.”[3]

By presenting himself as accidentally caught up in a form of “philosophical” Nazism for a brief period that was later transformed into one of “spiritual resistance” Heidegger tried to build a wall around his philosophical views. The methods he employed were silence about much of his activity before and after 1933, evasions, half-truths and outright lies.

In Heidegger's philosophy, the category of “silence” denotes not simply the absence of speech, but is itself an active form of being in the world. Likewise in his practice “silence” has meant the active suppression of evidence about his Nazi years. Much of Heidegger's correspondence and other personal documents have been unavailable to scholars for decades. These documents are kept under lock and key by the Heidegger family and sympathetic scholars. Furthermore, in the immediate postwar years, the academic community in Germany had been loathe to publicize anything related to Heidegger's Nazism. One early scholar who did much original research in this area, Guido Schneeberger, found that he could not find a publisher for his book. He eventually published his findings on his own in 1962.

Nor has Heidegger shied away from out-and-out falsification of his own history. A well-documented example involves the republication of his 1935 lecture on metaphysics. The 1953 edition of this lecture includes the infamous depiction of the “inner truth” of Nazism. The full statement in the 1953 edition reads as follows:

“The stuff which is now being bandied about as the philosophy of National Socialism—but which has not the least to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely the encounter between global technology and modern man)—is casting its net in these troubled waters of ‘values’ and ‘totalities.’”[4]

The publication of this article caused a bit of consternation in Germany. Some questioned why Heidegger chose to reprint this article in this exact form. He responded:

“It would have been easy to drop the aforementioned sentence, along with other ones you cite, from the printed manuscript. But I did not and I will keep it there in the future because, for one thing, the sentences belong historically to the lecture course ...”[5]

We now know that Heidegger did indeed make changes to the 1935 text when he prepared it for republication. For one thing, the more general “inner truth and greatness of this movement” is actually the much more specific “inner truth and greatness of National Socialism” in the original lecture. When an assistant helping him prepare the galley proofs for publication noticed this phrase, without any explanatory text, he asked Heidegger to remove it. Heidegger responded that he would not do so. Nevertheless, without telling his assistant, Heidegger did change the text a few weeks later. He removed the direct reference to “National Socialism” and substituted the general term “this movement.” He also added the explanatory comment about technology in parenthesis. Heidegger always maintained until his death that he never altered the text of this lecture. He reiterated this point in his 1966 *Der Spiegel* interview. In a later attempt to finally settle this controversy, a search was made of the original 1935 manuscript of the lecture. The page containing the controversial phrase was missing.[6]

The same methods—suppression of evidence, evasions and falsifications—were employed by the legions of Heidegger interpreters and apologists. They were, until the publication of Farias epochal book, largely successful in preventing any critical scrutiny of Heidegger's ideas and their relation to his politics. An ironic chapter in this enterprise was played out by the deconstruction theorist, Paul De Man. De Man did much to publicize Heidegger among the American intelligentsia in the 1960s. Then there came the posthumous revelation in the late 1980s that De Man's hands had not exactly been clean. He had been a Nazi collaborator in occupied Belgium during World War II and in that capacity had written

some anti-Semitic articles for a Nazi-sponsored literary magazine. After De Man's war-time essays were published there ensued a lively controversy about the relationship between De Man's war-time activity and his subsequent ideas on deconstruction.[7]

An even more sinister champion of Heidegger was the French translator Jean Beaufret. Beaufret, a former Resistance fighter, published several volumes of conversations with Heidegger before his death in 1982. For 35 years he was the most consistent defender of Heidegger in France. His credentials as a former Resistance fighter lent added weight to his defense of a former Nazi. Yet it seems that all along Beaufret had a hidden agenda. He had been for some time a secret sympathizer of the notorious Holocaust revisionist historian Robert Faurisson. Beaufret, like Faurisson, denied the existence of the Holocaust and more specifically of the gas chambers. In a letter sent to Faurisson, Beaufret was quoted as saying:

“I believe that for my part I have traveled approximately the same path as you and have been considered suspect for having expressed the same doubts [concerning the existence of the gas chambers]. Fortunately for me, this was done orally.”[8]

Beaufret's credentials were never questioned until Faurisson published his letters in the 1980s.

As part of their public relations campaign Heidegger and his apologists were particularly keen to enlist the testimony of German Jewish philosophers who had themselves suffered under the Nazis. To this end the well-known philosopher and German émigré Hanna Arendt was solicited to write an essay for an anthology honoring Heidegger on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. Arendt's essay, “Heidegger at Eighty,” contains the following cryptic allusion to Heidegger's political activities:

“Now we all know that Heidegger, too, once succumbed to the temptation to change his ‘residence’ and to get involved in the world of human affairs. As to the world, he was served somewhat worse than Plato because the tyrant and his victims were not located beyond the sea, but in his own country. [The reference is to the sojourn Plato undertook to Syracuse. He hoped to counsel the tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysus. After a relatively brief experiment in seeking to temper Dionysus rule with a dose of wisdom, Plato returned to Athens, concluding that his attempt to put his theories into practice had been a failure. A.S.] As to Heidegger himself, I believe that the matter stands differently. He was still young enough to learn from the shock of the collision, which after ten short hectic months thirty-seven years ago drove him back to his residence, and to settle in his thinking what he had experienced ...

“We who wish to honor the thinkers, even if our own residence lies in the midst of the world, can hardly help finding it striking and perhaps exasperating that Plato and Heidegger, when they entered into human affairs, turned to tyrants and Führers. This should be imputed not just to the circumstances of the times and even less to preformed character, but rather to what the French call a *déformation professionnelle*. For the attraction to the tyrannical can be demonstrated theoretically in many of the great thinkers (Kant is the great exception). And if this tendency is not demonstrable in what they did, that is only because very few of them were prepared to go beyond ‘the faculty of wondering at the simple’ and to ‘accept this wondering as their abode.’”[9]

According to the legal brief presented by Arendt, Heidegger's unfortunate lapse was due neither to the circumstances in which he lived, nor to his character and certainly has no echo in his ideas. The fact that Heidegger became a Nazi, which she euphemistically describes as, having “succumbed to the temptation to change his ‘residence’ and to get involved in the world of human affairs,” can be ascribed solely to the occupational hazard of being a philosopher. And if other philosophers did not follow in these footsteps, that can be explained by the fact that they did not take thinking as seriously as Heidegger. They were not prepared to “accept this wondering as their abode.”

Arendt's piece is notable for its sheer effrontery. She manages to make

Heidegger into the victim who fell prey to the greatness of his thought. To say that "He was served worse than Plato" is to imply that he was tossed about by forces beyond his control, that he bore no responsibility for his own actions. As if recognizing the absurdity of her position, Arendt shifts the argument from the body of her text into a long explanatory footnote. In this note she descends from the lofty rhetoric of her musings on Plato to some of the concrete issues surrounding the Heidegger affair. She returns to the theme of Heidegger's primal innocence and political naiveté, writing that "... the point of the matter is that Heidegger, like so many other German intellectuals, Nazis and anti-Nazis, of his generation never read *Mein Kampf*." [10]

Actually there is good evidence to suppose that Heidegger not only did read Hitler's opus, *Mein Kampf*, but approved of it. Tom Rockmore has convincingly argued that in his speech assuming the rectorate of Freiburg, Heidegger's "multiple allusions to battle are also intended as a clear allusion to Hitler's notorious view of the struggle for the realization of the destiny of the German people formulated in *Mein Kampf*." [11]

At a later point in her note, Arendt seeks to turn the tables on Heidegger's critics by trotting out the legend, manufactured by Heidegger himself, of his redemptive behavior following his "error."

"Heidegger himself corrected his own 'error' more quickly and more radically than many of those who later sat in judgment over him—he took considerably greater risks than were usual in German literary and university life during that period." [12]

Even in 1971, Hannah Arendt certainly knew better, or should have known better, than the tale she relates in this embarrassing apologia. She certainly knew for instance of Heidegger's 1953 republication of his essay discussing the "inner truth of National Socialism." She was also aware, through her friendship with Karl Jaspers, of the deplorable behavior Heidegger exhibited toward Jaspers and his Jewish wife. (Heidegger broke off all personal relations with Jaspers and his wife shortly after he became rector. It was only after the war that Heidegger tried to repair their personal relationship. Despite an intermittent exchange of letters, the two philosophers could never repair their personal relationship as a result of Heidegger's refusal to recant his support of Nazism.)

The reference to the "considerably greater risks" he took, is, like Heidegger's "spiritual opposition" to Nazism, an echo of Heidegger's own postwar fabrications. Why then did Hannah Arendt, a prominent liberal opponent of fascism, weigh in with such fervor in the attempt to rehabilitate Heidegger's reputation? One can only guess. Perhaps there was an element of loyalty to her former teacher, a loyalty that was strained but not broken by her persecution at the hands of the Nazis and her years in exile. (At one point she found herself in a Nazi prison. Later when war broke out, she was trapped in Nazi-occupied France, from which she managed a daring escape.) The most charitable interpretation of her grotesque defense of Heidegger is that she turned away from a truth that she could not face.

When Victor Farias' book hit the stores, it had an electrifying effect on Heidegger's followers in France. Following the publication of his *Heidegger and Nazism* in October of 1987, no less than six studies on the subject of Heidegger and Nazism were published in the following nine months. This should not have been a surprise. It was in France, after all, that Heidegger's influence found its deepest roots in the postwar period. The French debt to Heidegger extends from the existentialism of Sartre in the early postwar period to the more recent waves of structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction associated with Claude Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Also weighing in with their own interpretations of Heidegger's relation to Nazism were the postmodernists Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard.

One could, broadly speaking, break down the type of responses to Farias into three main categories. The first is the unconditional defense of Heidegger by his most orthodox keepers of the flame. This group is

represented by Francois Fedier, who, since the death of his teacher Beaufret, has been the most consistent defender of Heidegger in France. Fedier continues to deny that Heidegger ever had any problem with Nazism and simply dismisses the rectorate period as a youthful flirtation that has no bearing on Heidegger's thought. Fedier's response, in light of the voluminous material in Farias's book and others published since, commands little credibility outside of the most ardent devotees of the Heidegger cult.

The second type of response, represented by Derrida and his followers, is to acknowledge in general that there is a problem with Heidegger's philosophy insofar as it allowed him to realize its implications by becoming a Nazi. But then Derrida tries to turn the tables on Farias by insisting that the ultimate cause of Heidegger's turn to Nazism was the fact that Heidegger had not sufficiently emancipated himself by 1933 from pre-Heideggerian ways of thinking, particularly rationalism and humanism. According to Derrida's tortured logic, once Heidegger succeeded in liberating himself from "metaphysics" following his post 1935 "turn," his philosophy became the best form of anti-Nazism.

This perverse viewpoint was aptly summed up by one of Derrida's students, Lacoue-Labarthe, who said that "Nazism is a humanism." By this he meant that the philosophical foundations that underpinned the Enlightenment tradition of humanism had as their consequences the domination of humanity in the service of an all-encompassing universal-totalitarianism. Such thinking has become a common stock in trade of Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe and their followers. The notion that Nazism is just another expression of Enlightenment universalism has recently been expressed by the Americans Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg. They write, "This principle of sufficient reason, the basis of calculative thinking, in its totalizing, and imperialistic, form, can be seen as the metaphysical underpinning which made the Holocaust possible." [13]

From this premise, Lacoue-Labarthe builds a sophisticated defense of Heidegger. Unlike the orthodox Heideggerians, he concedes that Heidegger's thought was consistent with his Nazism. However, Lacoue-Labarthe then seeks to rescue Heidegger by claiming that the post-1935 Heidegger who had overcome metaphysics and humanism, was free from any Nazi blemish. This bizarre argument is then carried to its logical conclusion by other deconstructionists who insist that not only is the second coming of Heidegger free of the fascist taint, but that his work for the first time makes it possible for us to "think the Holocaust." Lest the reader thinks this is a polemical extravagance, listen to the words of Milchman and Rosenberg,

"While facets of Heidegger's thinking can provide insight into the experience of the Extermination, make it possible for us to think Auschwitz, the Holocaust can also help us to penetrate the opaqueness of the later Heidegger's thinking." [14]

Heidegger's accusers on the other hand have been dubbed "totalitarians" in some of the annals of the deconstructionists. Once more, as we saw in Arendt's piece, Heidegger was portrayed as a victim of small-minded and envious enemies. Weighing in on the French debate from the other side of the Rhine was the long-time Heidegger interpreter Hans-Georg Gadamer. In a curious echo of Arendt's 1971 essay, "Heidegger at Eighty," Gadamer returns to the image of the well-meaning but naïve thinker retreating from his attempt to educate the prince of Syracuse. [15]

In contrast to the philosophical obscurantism practiced by Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe, some voices have been raised in the French discussion that clearly acknowledge the problem posed by Heidegger's lifelong relationship to fascism. Most prominent among these is Pierre Bourdieu who wrote a major study on Heidegger long before Farias' book even appeared. This book was republished in French in a somewhat revised format after the controversy elicited by Farias's book broke. *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, attempts to ground Heidegger's philosophy in the historical context from which Heidegger emerged. At

the same time Bourdieu avoids the temptation of simply reducing Heidegger's thought to a reflex of his historical and class position. Bourdieu engages in a textual analysis of Heidegger's work in an attempt to show the intrinsic relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics. His textual analysis is distinguished from the type of "immanent" reading of texts characteristic of Derrida and other deconstructionists that artificially isolate texts from the historical circumstances in which they were produced.

Perhaps the most curious and damning recent defense of Heidegger came not from France but from Germany. Ernst Nolte, a historian and long-time friend of the Heidegger family, published a biography of Heidegger in 1992, *Martin Heidegger: Politics and History in His Life and Thought*. Prior to the publication of this book, Nolte was already notorious as a revisionist historian of the Holocaust and apologist for Nazism. Nolte has to be given his due as he was much more consistent and far more intellectually honest than some of the French defenders of Heidegger.

For Nolte, Heidegger's turn to Nazism does not represent any problem at all. Not only does Nolte insist on the intimate connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazism, but he also defends Nazism as a necessary response to the internal and external threat posed by the Russian Revolution. To Nolte Nazism was a necessary response to Bolshevism and Heidegger, by turning to Nazism, was merely responding to the call of historical necessity. Nolte even goes so far as to defend the Holocaust as a defensive measure made necessary by the hostility of world-Jewry to the National Socialist regime. Nolte's defense of the Holocaust is couched in the following rhetorical question:

"Could it be the case that the National Socialists and Hitler carried out an 'Asiatic' deed [the Holocaust] only because they considered themselves and their kind to be potential or actual victims of a [Soviet] 'Asiatic' deed. Didn't the 'Gulag Archipelago' precede Auschwitz?"[16]

There is a symmetry between the early apologists for Heidegger and Nolte's effort. Whereas the original defenders sought to minimize Heidegger's political involvement, then to build a wall between his politics and his philosophy, Nolte inverts the terms of the argument. Not only was Heidegger a politically engaged thinker from the start in Nolte's view, but he made the right choice. He writes, "Insofar as Heidegger resisted the attempt at the [Communist] solution, he, like countless others, was historically right.... In committing himself to the [National Socialist] solution perhaps he became a 'fascist.' But in no way did that make him historically wrong from the outset."[17]

Elsewhere Nolte returns to the story of Heidegger the otherworldly thinker who became briefly ensnared in political matters that he did not understand. This fertile image, introduced by Hannah Arendt, is turned on its head by Nolte. Doubtless he did not wish to let a Jew get in the last word here. He writes of Heidegger's support for Hitler that, "...it was not an episodic 'flight' from the realm of philosophy into everyday politics but was sustained by a 'philosophical' hope ... [and was] essential to his life and thought."[18]

In other words, Heidegger's thought and his practice were cut from the same cloth. He was not just a Nazi, but in the words of Thomas Sheehan, he was "a normal Nazi."

Finally, mention should be made of the most recent biography of Heidegger, Rüdiger Safranski's *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, first published in English in 1998. This book, unlike Nolte's effusive support for Heidegger's Nazism, is a retreat back to a more orthodox defense of Heidegger. Once again, we are presented with a schizophrenic division between Heidegger the man and the philosopher. The author diligently presents the known facts of Heidegger's association with Nazism. It is no longer tenable to deny these facts. At the same time he provides a largely positive reading of Heidegger's ideas.

While avoiding the excesses and logical gymnastics of Lacoue-Labarthe

and other deconstructionists, Safranski seems incapable of making any essential judgment about his subject. This deficiency, a common trademark of modern biography and historiography, is considered an advantage in today's dismal cultural context. The watchwords here are "detached" and "balanced." Despite the minutiae of facts, there is little understanding. In its own way, this book is another contribution to the cover-up. In the end, Safranski weighs in on the side of those who praise Heidegger for making it possible for us to "think Auschwitz." He writes:

"The fact that Heidegger rejected the idea that he should defend himself as a potential accomplice to murder does not mean that he shied away from the challenge 'to think Auschwitz.' When Heidegger refers to the perversion of the modern will to power, for which nature and man have become mere 'machinations,' he always explicitly or not, also means Auschwitz. To him, as to Adorno, Auschwitz is a typical crime of the modern age."[19]

We cannot let pass commenting on the arrogance of Safranski's juxtaposition of Heidegger with Theodore Adorno. Adorno despised Heidegger and had nothing but contempt for Heidegger's "jargon of authenticity," which he viewed as a form of philosophical charlatany passing itself off as profound insight. This dismal book, despite its account of the facts, represents but another apology for Heidegger's involvement with Nazism. It has nevertheless met with largely positive reviews.

A typical example is Richard Rorty, who wrote, "Heidegger was oblivious of the torment of his Jewish friends and colleagues, but after a year of hectic propagandizing and organizing, he did notice that the Nazi higher-ups were not paying much attention to him. This sufficed to show him that he had overestimated National Socialism.

"So he retreated to his mountain cabin and, as Safranski nicely says, traded decisiveness for imperturbability. After World War II, he explained, imaginatively albeit monomaniacally, that Americanization, modern technology, the trivialization of life and the utter forgetfulness of Being (four names, he thought, for the same phenomenon) were irreversible."[20]

Once again we meet the quotidian figure of the well-meaning but bruised thinker who "retreated to his mountain cabin." At least this time we are spared another return from Syracuse. We should point out that there is no basis even in Safranski's book to draw the conclusion that Heidegger, after "a year of hectic propagandizing and organizing," his period as rector at Freiburg, "withdrew" from the political fray. What Safranski does say is that over a period of several years following his resignation as rector, Heidegger gradually loosened his involvement with Nazism, without cutting them completely until 1945.

It turns out that Heidegger has defenders beyond the legion of French deconstructionists. Rorty represents a tendency that has emerged in recent years among American pragmatists, a tendency that has tried to amalgamate pragmatism with elements of continental philosophy. In his capacity as something of a public spokesman for American pragmatism, Rorty has above all sought to enlist the followers of Heidegger to his cause. In the following section we will briefly examine the philosophical basis for this curious amalgam of two seemingly disparate traditions. Yet even the most cursory examination reveals that when Rorty focuses on the relationship between Heidegger's politics and his philosophy, we are served up with another version of the by now familiar theme of Heidegger accidentally stumbling into Nazism.

In an essay that had been revised as recently as 1989, well after Farias' book was published, Rorty wrote that, "... Heidegger was only accidentally a Nazi." He then expanded on this thought in a note with the following explanation, "His [Heidegger's] thought was, indeed, essentially anti-democratic. But lots of Germans who were dubious about democracy and modernity did not become Nazis. Heidegger did because he was both more of a ruthless opportunist and more of a political ignoramus than

most of the German intellectuals who shared his doubts.”[21]

Although Rorty tosses in some harsh words in Heidegger's direction, to wit his characterization of Heidegger the “ignoramus” and “opportunist,” the gist of his presentation is another caricature of the naïve philosopher getting in over his head. By this time, we have become quite familiar with this argument. We have seen variations of it in Heidegger's own apology for his term as rector, in the orthodox defenders of Heidegger in France, in the reflections of personal friends such as Hannah Arendt, and in its inverted pro-Nazi form in Nolte's biography. That this argument can be repeated ad nauseam, in the face of an ever-mounting array of facts demonstrating that Heidegger's relation to Nazism was more than incidental, shows that we are dealing here not with an objective, scholarly judgment, but with bad faith and apologetics.

The debate in France lasted for about two years following the publication of Farias' book in 1987. Nowadays, very little is heard in France about Heidegger's politics. In contrast, since the beginning of the 1990s the discussion has continued unabated in the United States, Great Britain and other English-speaking countries. In fact, three separate books have appeared on the subject since 1997. Of these, Julian Young's book, *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism*, is foursquare in the tradition of the Heideggerian whitewash. In fact, the author announces his intentions right at the beginning, where he says that, “This work aims to provide what may be described as a ‘de-Nazification’ of Heidegger.”[22]

Tom Rockmore sums up the flavor of Young's book in a recent review. Rockmore writes, “In sum, according to Young, despite the many texts to the contrary (for instance, the comment in the Spiegel-Gespräch, where Heidegger questions the democratic ideal), the same philosopher turns out to be more or less like you and me: to wit, a proponent of liberal democracy. This is to say not a credible but an incredible picture of Heidegger ...”[23]

It is evident that a quarter century following the death of Heidegger, the cover-up still continues. At the same time, we do not wish to suggest that there has been an absence of countervailing tendencies working to expose Heidegger's politics. In fact, we have seen just this past year the publication of what may be the most important examination of Heidegger's philosophy in the context of his politics, namely Johannes Fritzsche's work, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger's Being and Time*. We will comment on this book in the next section.

Notes:

1. Martin Heidegger, “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University, November 4, 1945, Wolin, p. 61
2. Martin Heidegger, “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University, November 4, 1945, Wolin p. 64
3. Martin Heidegger, “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University, November 4, 1945, Wolin, pp. 64-66
4. Sheehan, “Heidegger and the Nazis”
5. Sheehan, “Heidegger and the Nazis”
6. Sheehan, “Heidegger and the Nazis”
7. Denis Donoghue, “The Strange Case of Paul De Man,” *New York Review of Books*, June 29, 1989
8. Richard Wolin, “French Heidegger Wars,” Wolin, p. 282.
9. Hannah Arendt, “Martin Heidegger at Eighty,” *New York Review of Books*, October 21, 1971
10. Arendt, “Martin Heidegger at Eighty”
11. Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 6
12. Arendt, “Martin Heidegger at Eighty”
13. Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Heidegger, Planetary Technics, and the Holocaust,” Milchman and Rosenberg, p. 222
14. Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Heidegger, Planetary Technics, and the Holocaust,” Milchman and Rosenberg, p. 224
15. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Back From Syracuse?” *Critical Inquiry* 15(2):

1989, pp. 427-430

16. Cited in Thomas Sheehan, “A Normal Nazi,” *New York Review of Books*, January 14, 1993

17. Cited in Thomas Sheehan, “A Normal Nazi”

18. Cited in Thomas Sheehan, “A Normal Nazi”

19. Safranski, p. 421.

20. Richard Rorty, Rev. of *Martin Heidegger. Between Good and Evil*, by Rüdiger Safranski, *New York Times Book Review*, May 3, 1998

21. Richard Rorty, “Philosophy as Science, Metaphor, Politics,” *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 19

22. Julian Young, *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 1

23. Tom Rockmore, “Recent Discussion of Heidegger and Politics: Young, Beistegui, Fritzsche,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 21, no.2, 1999, p. 53



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact